

Message Text

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ACTION IO-14

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 ISO-00 ICAE-00 NSCE-00
CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00
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O 091640Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY PRETORIA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2471
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY GABORONE
/AMEMBASSY LAGOS 1467
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MAPUTO
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 5318

LONDON FOR SECRETARY MOOSE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDEV, SF, WA
SUBJECT: NAMIBIA: THE VIEW FROM SOUTH AFRICA

1. PIK BOTHA RETURNED HOME YESTERDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, TO AN
ATMOSPHERE OF CRISIS AND UNCERTAINTY AGGRAVATED BY CONFUSING
SIGNALS IN THE MEDIA AND OFFICIAL STATEMENTS. THE PRO-SAG
CITIZEN ASSERTED IN A FRONT-PAGE ARTICLE, SEPT 8 THAT SOUTH AFRICA
FACES "ONE OF THE MOST CRITICAL PERIODS IN ITS HISTORY." IN HIS
AIRPORT CONFERENCE ON ARRIVAL, BOTHA AGAIN TOOK A TOUGH POSITION
ON THE ISSUES BUT LEFT THE DOOR AJAR FOR AGREEMENT, SAYING THAT
THIS DEPENDED ON "FURTHER MESSAGES FROM NEW YORK." THE SABC
RADIO COMMENTARY SEPT 8 ALSO NOTED THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S
RETURN DID NOT MEAN THAT THE SAG WAS BREAKING OFF NEGOTIATIONS
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ON THE QUESTION (PRETORIA 5285).

2. EDITORS OF THE AFRIKAANS NEWSPAPERS PRIVATELY EXPRESS
UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FINAL SAG DECISION, BUT SOME SAY THEY
DETECT A CONSERVATIVE SHIFT IN THE LAST FEW DAYS (PRETORIA 5296).
IN NAMIBIA ITSELF, THE DTA NEWS SUBSTANTIALLY TO THE SAME LINE
OF OBJECTION AS THE SAG, WHILE OTHER LEADING NAMIBIAN GROUPS

SHOW VARYING DEGREES OF SUPPORT FOR THE SYG'S PLAN. IN THE MEANTIME, THE PRIME MINISTER, THE PROSPECTIVELY DECISIVE VOICE, REMAINS SILENT.

3. OF THE THREE MAIN ISSUES WHICH THE SAG HAS RAISED, MOST ATTENTION IS NOW FOCUSED ON THE SIZE OF THE UN MILITARY FORCE. THE POLICE ISSUE, WE BELIEVE, WILL PROBABLY BE RESOLVED THROUGH THE SYG'S EXPECTED CLARIFICATION OF THE SUBJECT. SOUTH AFRICA'S MOTIVATION IN OPPOSING THE PROPOSED SIZE OF THE UN FORCE IS A COMPLEX OF TACTICAL, POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS. SAG DISTRUST OF THE UN IS WELL KNOWN, AND THERE IS FEAF HERE THAT ONCE THE UN IS ENTRENCHED, IT WILL DO AS IT LIKES. THE SAG IS PERHAPS MOST DISTURBED BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL'S AND AHTISAARI'S FAILURE TO CONSULT WITH IT OR STEYN ON THIS ISSUE AND IT WISHES TO SENSITIZE THE UN AND THE WEST TO SOUTH AFRICA'S PREROGATIVES UNDER THE WESTERN PROPOSAL, AND TO SET THE PARAMETERS FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION. THUS,VORSTER AND PIK BOTHA DO NOT WANT TO LET THIS DECISION GO BY UNCHALLENGED. IN ADDITION, THEY MAY HOPE TO GAIN LEVERAGE ON OTHER MORE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS, SUCH AS THE COMPOSITION OF THE UN FORCES.

4. THE SAG IS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF AN EXTENSIVE, HIGHLY VISIBLE UN PRESENCE ON THE NAMIBIAN VOTERS, WHILE SADF PRESENCE IS PHASED DOWN TO A RESTRICTED TOKEN FORCE WITH NO ROLE TO PLAY. SOUTH AFRICA DOES NOT WANT TO GIVE THE APPEARANCE TO
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EITHER NAMIBIANS OR SOUTH AFRICANS--OR, FOR THAT MATTER, TO SWAPO OR ANYONE ELSE--THAT THE UN IS "TAKING OVER" THE TERRITORY BEFORE INDEPENDENCE.

5. ACCORDING TO THE DAO, SAG MILITARY OFFICERS ARE CONCERNED THAT IN THE EVENT OF A COLLAPSE OF THE CEASEFIRE AND A SAG DECISION TO TAKE MILITARY MEASURES TO RESTORE CONTROL, THERE SHOULD BE AS FEW UN FORCES AS POSSIBLE GETTING IN THE WAY. THE PROSPECT OF THE UN OPERATION ENDING IN COLLAPSE HAS BEEN SUGGESTED BY ADMINISTRATOR GENERAL STEYN. HE ASSERTED ON SEPT 7 THAT A RECENT SWAPO BROADCAST FROM ANGOLA INDICATED SWAPO INTENDED TO CONTINUE ITS GUERRILLA OPERATIONS AND LAUNCH A MASSIVE ATTACK ONCE UN FORCES HAD ARRIVED, AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEFENSE FORCE HAD BEEN "NEUTRALIZED." THE SADF CANNOT SIMPLY IGNORE SUCH A CONTINGENCY AND WANTS TO LIMIT THE OBSTACLES TO EFFECTIVE COUNTERACTION.

6. FINALLY, THE HEIGHTENING STRUGGLE FOR THE SUCCESSION IS ALMOST CERTAINLY A HIGHLY IMPORTANT ELEMENT IN THE PICTURE. FOR PIK BOTHA PARTICULARLY IT IS ESSENTIAL TO AVOID ANY APPEARANCE OF LOSING CONTROL TO THE MISTRUSTED UN AND SEEMING IN THE PROCESS TO IMPROVE SWAPO'S PROSPECTS. HIS POLITICAL

COMPETITORS, NOTABLY P.W. BOTHA, STAND READY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SUCH AN EVENTUALITY.

7. ASSUMING THE SAG WILL NOT IN ANY EVENT, CATEGORICALLY REJECT THE PLAN, IT WOULD SEEM TO HAVE TWO BASIC SAG OPTIONS: (1) INDICATE ITS WILLINGNESS TO MOVE AHEAD WHILE REASSERTING ITS INTERPRETATION OF KEY POINTS; AND (2) INSIST ON FURTHER CLARIFICATIONS IF NOT ADJUSTMENTS BEFORE AGREEING TO PROCEED. IN ANY EVENT, THE SAG MAY MAKE ITS DECISION KNOWN PRIOR TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING IN ORDER TO AVOID THE APPEARANCE OF ACTING UNDER THE GUN.

8. ALTHOUGH OUT OF THE HOSPITAL, THE PRIME MINISTER HAS REMAINED AT HOME IN CAPE TOWN, AND THUS, IT IS UNCERTAIN WHETHER
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HE WILL CHAIR THE CABINET MEETING NEXT WEEK ON THE NAMIBIAN ISSUE. BUT EVEN IF HE DOES NOT, HIS VIEWS VERY LIKELY WILL BE CRITICAL. SIGNIFICANTLY, VORSTER HAS MADE NO STATEMENT ON THE SYG'S PLAN. WHILE WE CANNOT RULE OUT AN UNFAVORABLE DECISION, THE ODDS STILL FAVOR A POSITIVE IF CONDITIONAL RESPONSE.
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